

We in our country take pride in saying that we are moving to end discrimination of all kinds. Today, we have an opportunity to end discrimination and the violence that goes with it that equal a hate crime. So whatever you may think of any one of us, based on our ethnicity or our gender or whatever, you have no right to act upon that opinion in a violent way. Who would disagree with that? That is why I hope that we can send a clear message from the Congress that this Congress does not agree with that and pass this legislation.

Who of us can think of the story of the Shepard family and the Byrd family and so many examples that we have of this and not say that is wrong. And at the very least, we can pass legislation that tells Federal authorities that they can assist State and local authorities in enforcing the law. Over 100,000 hate crimes reported since 1991. There are so many more that go unreported, many of them unprosecuted.

So today, let us take this step forward that is consistent with the values of our Founders, both in terms of all being equal, and our faith that we are all God's children, but also consistent with the call and the preamble to form a more perfect union.

Again, passing this legislation makes America more American. I urge a "yes" vote.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield now for a unanimous consent request to the gentleman from Ohio.

(Mr. KUCINICH asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this legislation, because our Nation is one.

I rise today in support of the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act. Crime, violent crime in particular, has repercussions beyond the individual perpetrator and victim. It impacts family and friends and the surrounding community.

Hate crimes, whether motivated by the race, creed, or sexual orientation of an individual, terrorize a community. In 2005, 7,163 hate crimes were reported to the FBI. Over half of those hate crimes were motivated by race-related bias. Seventeen percent were crimes based on religion. One in six hate crimes is motivated by the victim's sexual orientation. The purpose and intention of these crimes extends beyond the crime itself. They serve to instill fear in others sharing that trait.

This legislation does not punish thoughts or speech; it punishes crimes motivated by bias against the race, religion, national origin, gender identity, or sexual orientation of the victim. It gives law enforcement additional tools to punish violent crimes.

Hate crimes are inherently divisive. Regardless of the group targeted, hate crimes undermine our collective ability to look past our differences and find common ground. If we as a Nation seek the eradication of acts of violence, we must address the underlying causes of that violence. We must uncover and address the hatred and discrimination that motivates these crimes.

This legislation is step towards that goal. I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 1592.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I now yield 30 seconds to the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER).

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, we make progress in dealing with discrimination based on sexual orientation when we're not distracted by myth and bigotry, but when we deal with the rights and needs of real people. I am pleased that that is why we will pass this hate crime legislation today which follows progress in my State of Oregon just this week, where we have provided protection for domestic partnerships and antidiscrimination legislation. I hope it will herald changes on the Federal level in the military for gays and lesbians, and in the workplace with non-discrimination protection for all Americans.

When we deal with real people, their rights and needs, we will solve these problems and America will be a better place.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased now to yield 30 seconds to my dear friend from Maryland (Mr. WYNN).

Mr. WYNN. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of this legislation because it is time to take a stand against the violence, the violent acts that flow from prejudice. This is not about the thought police, this is not about sermons on morality, this is about the status of our civilization, and it is about our humanity.

As human beings, we have the right to be safe from physical attack, no matter our race, our religion, sexual orientation or gender identity. In other words, human beings have the right to be safe from attacks based on who they are. No one should have to be afraid because of who they are.

We need to pass this legislation to ensure that this principle is embodied in our law.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to recognize our brother from Missouri (Mr. CLEAVER), himself a minister, for 30 seconds.

Mr. CLEAVER. Mr. Speaker, as best as can be determined, I have delivered at least 15,600 sermons. I have never been investigated, I have never been indicted. I have spoken in churches and synagogues all around this country. I have spoken to thousands of pastors and clergy. I know not one who has been investigated for a sermon.

And so today I must not say I cannot, I must not, I will not sit silently and watch any injustice because in the words of my unlettered grandmother, "The God I serve don't make no trash."

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I now recognize the gentleman from Rhode Island (Mr. LANGEVIN) for 30 seconds.

(Mr. LANGEVIN asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. LANGEVIN. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of the Hate Crimes Prevention Act. This legislation will expand the Federal definition of hate crimes to include crimes which a victim was selected because of his or her disability.

So much has been done over the years to ensure inclusion of Americans with disabilities in our communities. Sadly, though, there have been shameful instances where these Americans, who may look or speak differently than others, are victims of abuse, neglect or targeted crimes. Investigating and prosecuting hate violence against someone with a disability involves unique challenges to law enforcement. Many violent crimes against people with disabilities go unreported or unprosecuted. Providing Federal resources to law enforcement is essential to help ensure proper prosecution of these crimes.

I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 1592, the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2007. This legislation will expand the Federal definition of hate crimes, allowing for Federal resources for law enforcement in their investigations and prosecutions of hate crimes.

I come to the floor today to draw attention to the inclusion of crimes in which a victim was selected because of his or her disability.

The Supreme Court's Olmstead decision, the ADA and other progressive policies have resulted in increased inclusion of Americans with disabilities in our classrooms, workplaces and communities. As a nation, we are growing in our acceptance of those who are perceived as "different." But this effort has not been without growing pains. Many people with disabilities look or speak differently or struggle with challenges like chronic seizures. We have seen too many shameful instances where these Americans are the victims of abuse, neglect and targeted crimes.

I recently learned the story of Ricky Whistnant, a mentally retarded adult man who was excited to have the opportunity to live independently at the age of 39. With the support of a local social service agency, he moved out of a Connecticut state group home and learned to cook for himself, maintain an apartment and be a part of the community. One evening, after cooking himself a chicken dinner, Ricky went to the corner store to buy some soda. He encountered a group of teenagers who mocked him, followed him back to his apartment, hurled a soda bottle at him. After he fell, striking his head on a windowsill, the boys continued to kick and taunt him. Ricky died a short time later in the hospital.

Ricky's story is extreme, but it is not isolated. It represents the reality of the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities. Investigating and prosecuting hate violence against someone with a disability involves unique challenges to law enforcement, and sadly many violent crimes against people with disabilities go unreported or unprosecuted.

As policymakers, we have a responsibility to address this problem. The inclusion of disability in the Federal hate crimes statute is a meaningful and substantive way to combat violence against Americans with disabilities. I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of H.R. 1592.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, may I inquire as to how much time is remaining?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Texas controls 4 minutes.